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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 52nd MEETING

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| Chairman: | Mr. BIGGAR<br>(Vice-Chairman) | (Ireland) |
| later: | Mr. CISSÉ<br>(Chairman) | (Senegal) |

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 97: ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN (continued)

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In the absence of the Chairman, Mr. Biggar (Ireland), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 97: ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN (continued) (A/49/38, A/49/176, A/49/204-E/1994/90, A/49/205-E/1994/91, A/49/217-E/1994/103, A/49/287-S/1994/894 and Corr.1, A/49/308, A/49/314, A/49/327 and Corr.1, A/49/349, A/49/354, A/49/365-E/1994/119, A/49/378, A/49/381, A/49/462 and Corr.1, A/49/506, A/49/532, A/49/587 and Corr.1; A/C.3/49/13)

1. Mrs. TERRAZAS ONTIVEROS (Bolivia) said that the issue of the advancement of women, which had been under consideration by the United Nations for a long time, had acquired new momentum since it was extended to include the integration of women into development, peacemaking and international cooperation efforts. It should be recognized, however, that the gender gap had still not been closed and that women were still not the de facto and de jure equals of men. It was no longer sufficient to state that women's rights were fundamental rights; rather, the traditional idea of women's role in the family, community and government should be broadened at the policy- and decision-making levels.

2. While almost all States had endorsed the principles concerning the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women elaborated by the United Nations and had established national bodies to deal with that issue, only very few of them had actually taken steps to bring about the full political, economic and social integration of women by eliminating obstacles to such integration in the areas of work, education, health, empowerment and poverty alleviation and suppressing situations of armed conflict and violence against women.

3. In Bolivia, efforts to that end were being hampered by obstacles stemming from the country's ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity and by a social class structure which determined what the prospects of socio-economic and political integration of women would be. Therefore, the aims of the Government's development policy were to improve the standard of living of the people and to promote broad-based participation. Two major laws had been passed, the first on the reform of the system of education and bilingual education and the second on violence against women. Women's issues, which had previously been dealt with only by non-governmental organizations, were now being discussed by civil society and the Government, together with political parties, civic committees and occupational associations, and that should help to arrive at a new approach to those issues which reflected the complexity of gender relations. Social policies had only recently begun to reflect such considerations; Bolivian women's organizations had grown in importance; and women currently participated in some decision-making bodies. However, the progress achieved thus far was slow and insufficient.

4. As part of the preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women, a national preparatory committee had been established and a national report on the advancement of Bolivian women had been prepared under the auspices of the Ministry of Social Development. It was to be hoped that the Conference would

afford States the opportunity to reaffirm their political will to enhance the status of women, as States had the prime responsibility for broadening women's prospects of participating as agents and beneficiaries in the effort to end discrimination against them. International cooperation, especially with a number of developing countries, like Bolivia, should aim at enhancing established institutional capacity in order to enable women to contribute effectively and directly to the process of change.

5. She thanked the Secretary-General for his reports under the agenda item on the advancement of women and welcomed his efforts to meet the targets set to improve the situation of women in the Secretariat, especially with respect to senior decision-making posts.

6. Mrs. NAUTA (Netherlands) said that she had been selected by the women's movement in the Netherlands to defend the interests of women at the United Nations, a fact which proved that in many respects it was still premature to talk about equality. Women themselves must help to remedy that situation at the national and international levels.

7. Preparations were in full swing everywhere for the Fourth World Conference on Women, to be held in 1995 at Beijing to discuss the issue of the unequal position of women. Five regional meetings had been held to that end, and their results would be integrated into a platform for action, the final document of the Conference, on the themes of action for equality, development and peace.

8. Equality was still a distant ideal. No matter how actively involved they were in all areas of everyday life, women still remained more the servants than the leaders of society. Equality would not exist until women were represented at all decision-making levels. To achieve that, both women and men must be made aware not only of the current state of inequality but also of women's rights and the manner in which they could be realized. Women should also be properly equipped to take their destinies into their own hands and to make choices that were not dictated by traditional and cultural considerations but by their own aspirations and ambitions.

9. Besides education, which was essential to professional success and social advancement, women needed access to good, affordable health care and must have the right to choose the contraception which suited them.

10. The Cairo International Conference on Population and Development had stressed women's crucial role as both agents and beneficiaries of development in a changing world, and it was to be hoped that the World Summit for Social Development to be held at Copenhagen would also recognize that fact. Social equality, sharing of responsibilities, development and growth could only thrive in a peaceful environment.

11. The adoption of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women marked a new phase in United Nations policies as did the decision to appoint a Special Rapporteur on violence against women. Moreover, the appointment of the Special Rapporteur had drawn the attention of the Centre for Human Rights to that issue and had contributed to making it an element of human rights policy which should become more efficient and effective once the

Commission on the Status of Women and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women began to cooperate with the Special Rapporteur.

12. Women continued to be exposed to violence, war and disasters. Genital mutilation was still rampant, and prenatal sex selection, trafficking in girls and women and forced prostitution still occurred on a large scale. Those responsible for that trafficking must be tracked down and extradited, and supplementary measures were needed to come to the aid of victims and provide them with security and support.

13. Sexual harassment, too, was a violation of women's rights. Her delegation therefore welcomed the measures taken by the United Nations Secretariat to combat the practice in the Organization. That example should be emulated by other large organizations so that women could feel safe at least in the workplace.

14. Women's position should be improved, so that they could organize their lives as they thought fit and be respected as individuals in their own community.

15. Ms. ESHMAMBETOVA (Kyrgyzstan), referring to the statement made by the Secretary-General of the Fourth World Conference on Women, said that it was indeed in the interest of all nations and all women of the world to "turn the dreams of Nairobi into practical action at Beijing".

16. Her delegation supported the proposal made by the Secretary-General in his report (A/49/217-E/1994/103) to merge the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). It was indeed essential for women to participate in both the policy-making and the development process.

17. Her delegation was pleased with the national and regional activities described in the report of the Secretary-General on preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women (A/49/327). It also appreciated the cooperation of the main bodies of the United Nations with specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations. It was only by joint efforts that States, regions and the world community could ensure the success of the Fourth World Conference.

18. The report of the Secretary-General on the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat (A/49/587) showed that the percentage of women in posts subject to geographical distribution was still lower than the target set for 1995. Women were promoted less often and few reached the P-5 level. In that regard, her delegation wished to draw the Secretary-General's attention to the fact that very few posts were occupied by women from countries in transition. Kyrgyzstan would be willing to provide highly qualified professional women to the Secretariat, but it did not have a quota.

19. In the near future Kyrgyzstan would join the many States parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women listed in the report of the Secretary-General (A/49/308).

20. Her delegation attached the highest importance to the advancement of women. Women had always played a central role in Kyrgyz society since they had traditionally been the heads of households. They comprised just over half the population of Kyrgyzstan. Two thirds of them lived in rural areas. More than 80 per cent of Kyrgyz women completed secondary education and many went on to higher levels of education. Through women's organizations and associations, women were also participating actively in the changes that were being made in all sectors of society. Representatives from two of those organizations were members of the electoral commission recently established by President Akayev to monitor the elections for the Parliament of Kyrgyzstan in December 1994.

21. Kyrgyz women, who had been prominent in the academic world and politics for years, were also participating actively in the economic development of Kyrgyzstan. Many of them worked in trade and commerce. Women in less privileged positions were benefiting from a national social support programme recently introduced by her Government.

22. Despite those achievements, women had been very hard hit, particularly in 1993 and 1994, by the severe economic difficulties in Kyrgyzstan. While 83 per cent of women had participated in the labour force at one time, 77 per cent of them were now unemployed. They had previously held many posts in the social sector, health care and education, but the social service budget had been sharply reduced after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Although women could count on the support of their families, they were suffering from the reduction of State-provided services, particularly in the rural areas.

23. In the areas of health and the environment, women were at particular risk. Although a large proportion of women had attained high levels of education, many women worked on farms. Breast milk, food and water were liable to be contaminated by the pesticides to which women and children were exposed. Children often had to work in the fields at a very young age and did not receive proper education. As many as 80 per cent of pregnant women suffered from anaemia. Infant mortality had risen while the birth rate had fallen.

24. Many women, particularly in remote areas, had no access to information on family planning, or to modern health care facilities. Abortion was all too common and was often used as a form of birth control.

25. Kyrgyzstan felt that the issues of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, especially the interrelationship between population, sustained development, and the education, economic status and empowerment of women, were particularly relevant. It was committed to implementing the Programme of Action of that Conference and looked forward to continued cooperation with the United Nations specialized agencies in that field.

26. Kyrgyzstan also looked forward to participating in the Fourth World Conference on Women to be held at Beijing in 1995. That Conference would be an opportunity to take stock of the past 10 years, adopt a platform for action on awareness-raising, the participation of women in decision-making, literacy, poverty, health, violence, national machinery, refugees and technology, determine priority action to be taken between 1996 and 2001 for the advancement of women and mobilize women and men at all levels to achieve those objectives.

27. In conclusion, although Kyrgyzstan was in the midst of a difficult economic transition, her Government, and Kyrgyz society, had demonstrated a commitment to improve the status of women and to uphold international standards for action.

28. Mr. Cissé took the Chair.

29. Ms. SAPCANIN (Bosnia and Herzegovina) said that, having given notification of succession, the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina had become a State party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and to all other international instruments protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms. Those rights and freedoms were also protected by the Constitution and laws of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina which prohibited any form of discrimination against women and ensured full respect for women's equality. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, mothers and working women enjoyed special health coverage and many other benefits. Moreover, women were encouraged to pursue professional advancement, thereby increasing their independence and ensuring equal participation in all spheres of life.

30. Women whose supporting family members had been killed during the war received assistance from the State and support from various humanitarian organizations and women's associations.

31. The Fourth World Conference would be an important landmark in the efforts made to improve the status of women. In view of the tragic situation of her country, her Government attached great importance to the issue of violence against women and mechanisms to eradicate it, an issue that would be taken up at the Conference. The overwhelming majority of victims of aggression by the Serb forces were in the civilian population, above all the most vulnerable members - women, children and the elderly.

32. The international community had welcomed the advancement of women in some countries. In other countries, women had just begun to assert their status. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, however, women had been stripped of all rights to development. In the besieged towns, they lacked basic food and medical provisions; their homes had been destroyed and their lives endangered. Women accounted for 60 per cent of the estimated 1,250,000 refugees who had fled from Bosnia and Herzegovina and 65 per cent of displaced persons within Bosnia and Herzegovina (1,228,000). Even when fleeing, they were in imminent danger. They often had to cross areas of armed conflict or were exposed to assaults and rape.

33. Non-Serb women, the majority of them Muslim, had been the victims of a particular form of genocide consisting of mass and systematic rape. According to the reports of the Commission of Experts, the Special Rapporteur and numerous humanitarian and non-governmental organizations, rape was used as an instrument of war in order to instil terror and to humiliate the entire nation.

34. In describing the situation in 1993, her delegation had hoped that the international community would take appropriate steps to halt the violence occurring before its very eyes in the heart of Europe. And yet women of all ages continued to be attacked. In the Serb-held territories in the north of Bosnia, ethnic cleansing had entered its final stage; harassment, rape, torture and murder continued. In the so-called United Nations "safe areas", the

population continued to live in terror of being invaded by Serb forces, which had already overrun Bihac and Gorazde.

35. The youngest and the most elderly women had not been spared by the systematic campaign of violence. All existing international instruments had been violated and there were no instruments which provided for punishment of some of the crimes perpetrated, such as forced pregnancy.

36. According to data collected by the State Commission of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, there had been 25,000 cases of rape, but the trauma suffered by the victims made it difficult to ascertain the precise number. Rape was also perpetrated in the 200 camps in the occupied territories to which women had been deported en masse. Many women - the Commission had registered 200 - had been killed after being raped. Others were reported missing or had committed suicide.

37. Such mass rape had been carefully premeditated and was under no circumstances a by-product of the war environment. According to numerous witnesses, confirmed by the Special Rapporteur, it was clear that the forces of aggression had been given orders to rape women and very young girls before the eyes of their families in order to humiliate them in the most brutal fashion.

38. The consequences of such rape were horrendous, both physically - the severity of the wounds could cause sterility - and psychologically. How could the victims assume their role in society and in their families after suffering such a trauma?

39. Her Government had taken measures to provide financial, medical and psychological assistance to the women who had been victims of such violence. Psychological and social support services had been established at Sarajevo and Zenica, but they were not sufficient to respond to needs, which continued to increase as the aggression persisted.

40. Accountability for the crimes was a prerequisite for restoring the moral and political order of society. Initially, certain victims felt the need to keep silent or to deny the aggression they had suffered, but their participation in the prosecution of their aggressors might be crucial to regaining their own equilibrium and restoring the moral foundation of their society. The long-awaited opening of the proceedings of the International Tribunal for the Prosecution of Violations Committed in the Former Yugoslavia, established under Security Council resolution 827 (1993), was a very significant phase of the process initiated to that end.

41. Many women's groups and non-governmental organizations which were collecting testimony on war-related crimes hoped that the International Tribunal would take action to ensure that rape was investigated with the same thoroughness as other violations. They also hoped that members of the Tribunal would be qualified and would receive appropriate guidance in the proper investigation of those crimes, and that rape and other forms of sexual assault would be characterized and prosecuted as a form of torture and as one of the most serious crimes. In that context, it had been recommended that women with specialized training should be appointed to the staff of the Office of the

Prosecutor and to the Tribunal. The necessary funds should be made available to those bodies so that they could carry out their functions as expeditiously as possible. Her delegation therefore invited Member States and governmental and non-governmental organizations to make voluntary contributions to that end and to second experts to the Office of the Prosecutor and the Tribunal. Another recommendation made was that measures for the protection and support of eyewitnesses during the trials should be strengthened. As indicated in the report of the International Tribunal (A/49/342), the Victims and Witnesses Unit had been unable to carry out its functions fully for lack of resources and experienced staff. Lastly, the rehabilitation and compensation of victims should be ensured.

42. The greatest attention should be devoted to those proposals. Her delegation hoped that they would be adopted. None the less, the suffering of the victims of violence would not end until a just peace had been restored, and until those persons would no longer have to live in fear of losing their lives or seeing their loved ones murdered.

43. For that reason, her Government continued to support the plan proposed by the Contact Group. It was regrettable that, despite their commitment to peace and justice, the members of the Contact Group had not respected the commitments they had undertaken towards the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and under the Charter of the United Nations. However, if the Organization could not protect the legal and moral rights of its Member States - particularly small States - which were enshrined in international instruments, who would fulfil that role?

44. Mr. OUCH (Cambodia) said that the advancement of women should be promoted in the social, economic and legal sectors in order to ensure that they enjoyed the same rights and advantages as men. In Cambodia, more than 20 years of war had destroyed all the country's economic, social and cultural bases and the Khmer Rouge policy of genocide had resulted in the savage and systematic massacre of more than 2 million Cambodians between 1975 and 1979. With the restoration of democracy since the free elections held in May 1993, the reconstruction process had resumed. Outlaw Khmer Rouge members, however, pursued their activities of destruction and massacre, not only against their own people but also against foreign tourists. Their countless human rights violations, in particular against women, were described in the report of the Secretary-General (A/49/635).

45. As a result of the war, women accounted for more than 60 per cent of the population. They therefore bore the main responsibility for child care, household tasks and food production. They were the largest contributors to the national economy, and, in the home, they traditionally held the purse strings.

46. It would therefore come as no surprise that women in Cambodia lived in dire poverty. Owing to a combination of economic and cultural factors, their educational level was well below that of men. From 1979 to 1993, the protection of women's interests had been ensured by the Women's Association of Cambodia, a popular governmental organization which oversaw a nationwide network but which lacked the necessary human and material resources to fulfil its mandate. Its role had been transferred to a new secretariat, which was divided into three departments (women's rights, women's health, women and development) and was

represented at the central, provincial and local levels. However, national efforts were not sufficient. Since 1985, a growing number of international non-governmental organizations and, more recently, Cambodian intergovernmental organizations had conducted specific activities for women within the framework of community development programmes, chiefly in the rural communes. Their activities included economic initiatives (income-generating loans), educational programmes (literacy; vocational training; information on health, hygiene and nutrition) and social services (community projects or advisory services in urban areas).

47. In a society conceived and governed by men, Cambodian women had none the less managed to progress on all fronts. An overwhelming majority of them had participated in the 1993 election for 120 members of the National Constituent Assembly. Aware of its obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and resolved to implement the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, the Royal Government of Cambodia was redoubling its efforts at all institutional levels to defend the interests of women and to eliminate all discriminatory measures against them, both de jure and de facto. The new political constitution promulgated by the National Assembly on 21 September 1993 contained 20 articles on the promotion and defence of the rights of citizens and their duties; and on full respect for the rights of men, women and children as outlined in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the relevant conventions.

48. Support for action taken by his Government in that area had been provided by international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the specialized agencies of the United Nations, in particular UNIFEM, which, since the pre-election period in 1993, had made a significant contribution to the integration of women into the development process and political life. Moreover, in close cooperation with UNDP, UNIFEM had actively helped to reintegrate more than 350,000 refugees, in addition to internally displaced persons. It had also assisted the Secretariat for Women's Affairs.

49. His delegation was profoundly grateful to UNIFEM for the valuable assistance it had provided to Cambodian women and thanked all international NGOs for the material and moral support they continued to offer.

50. Mrs. ATTAH (Nigeria) stressed the importance of the advancement of women to the whole issue of human rights, and of capacity-building and optimal utilization of the resources allocated to sustainable development. She referred to points made in a number of statements which had aroused her delegation's interest: the preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women; the need to take concrete action in order to ensure the empowerment and advancement of women; the importance of the role which UNIFEM must play in order to enhance women's participation in decision-making and in the implementation of development programmes at the local, national, regional and international levels; the general agreement that capacity-building for women was crucial to ensuring a better future for humankind; and the consensus on the need to prevent violence against women.

51. The new awareness within the United Nations system and in society of the need for the advancement of women, coupled with the new partnership emerging

between governmental and non-governmental organizations and the private and public sectors, augured well for development programmes for women. She reaffirmed, however, that efforts in that regard must be aimed, in particular, at ensuring the economic empowerment of women. She therefore urged that the necessary action should be taken to guarantee equal access by young girls to all opportunities and resources. In that connection, she welcomed the activity conducted in the framework of the UNICEF/UNESCO Joint Committee on Education. She called for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women at all levels of professional training. She underscored the primary role which NGOs and the mass media had to play in that connection.

52. Her delegation was pleased to note that the Nigerian National Commission for Women provided assistance to women's groups in setting up economic development projects. In anticipation of the Fourth World Conference on Women, her Government had established a National Preparatory Committee, which was very active and had already submitted Nigeria's country report to the secretariat of the Conference. While Nigerian women still lagged far behind men according to most socio-economic development indicators, they were none the less very active participants in social, political and economic life. The National Council for Women's Societies, an umbrella organization for more than 40 women's professional associations, played an important role in the promotion of its affiliated associations and of rural women. It created awareness among women of the opportunities available to them to become full and responsible members of their communities. It encouraged Nigerian rural women, who usually excelled in agriculture and at selling, to improve their skills through adult education and the cooperative movement.

53. Moreover, bank credit programmes enabled the rural population to engage in productive activities. Such measures had helped to raise the social status of many enterprising rural women. Access to local credit and individual initiative continued to grow and were gaining greater momentum.

54. The effective participation of the Nigerian delegation in the African Regional Preparatory Meeting, held at Dakar, Senegal, attested to the importance which the Nigerian Federal Government and national NGOs attached to the Fourth World Conference on Women. In preparing for the Conference, emphasis must be placed on programmes which enabled women to become more active participants in development activities. In that connection, it was gratifying to note that a large number of Member States had signed or ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

55. Her delegation paid tribute to the friendly countries, United Nations system and its specialized agencies, programmes and funds, and to the non-governmental organizations which, at the bilateral or multilateral level, had helped Nigeria to implement its local projects for the advancement of women. It welcomed the efforts made within the United Nations system to integrate women's needs into technical cooperation programmes. It encouraged the strengthening of inter-agency coordination in the planning and implementation of programmes at the local, national, regional and international levels with a view to optimizing the use of limited resources. It also advocated an integrated rather than a piecemeal approach in considering potential donors to women's programmes.

56. Her delegation considered UNIFEM to be a veritable vehicle for the advancement of women. The Federal Government of Nigeria was pleased to host the UNIFEM Regional Office for West Africa. It would continue to give its full support to the Fund and looked forward with optimism to the implementation of its programmes for the advancement of women in the subregion. It was regrettable, however, that the UNIFEM budget of $US 11 million was insufficient to respond to the aspirations of rural women, who were the poorest of the poor. It was incumbent on all Governments to seek additional funding in order to enable UNIFEM to finance essential programmes proposed by women themselves.

57. The proposed merger of INSTRAW and UNIFEM should be reconsidered. In her delegation's view, the issue of cost, which had sparked the proposal had not been clearly established. None the less, the advancement of women should not be sacrificed under the guise of reorganization. Whatever solution was contemplated, women should not be deprived of the useful services which the two United Nations organs would be capable of rendering, if they had the necessary resources.

58. Concerning the advancement of women at the decision-making level, the United Nations must act on its assertions. It was regrettable that, for the election of officers to a major United Nations organ, the only female candidate with the requisite qualifications, experience, efficiency and skills had not been given the necessary support. It was time for the United Nations to take action that reflected its position if it wished its pronouncements on gender equity and equality to be taken seriously.

59. Mr. MWAKAWAGO (United Republic of Tanzania) said that while some notable successes had been registered in the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies, women the world over remained relegated to low positions in society, mainly because of structural barriers which reinforced gender inequality in all aspects of life. It was therefore to be hoped that the action platform to be adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, whose theme would be action for equality, development and peace, would provide guidance as to how to promote the integration of women. In Africa and other developing countries, integration of women meant eradication of poverty, providing women access to education, health, technology and employment, involving them in economic activities and shielding them from violence and the effects of armed conflicts. However, the foregoing were not an end in themselves but a means of achieving the total advancement of women and the realization of all their rights.

60. The conflicts throughout the world which affected women and children were all the more frustrating since the ongoing process of democratization and reform would otherwise have been expected to enhance equality and development. Given the lessening of global tension, it was imperative for countries to re-examine their defence expenditures so as to allocate more resources to social services, including the integration of women into development because democracy could not be achieved in a context of inequality, gender discrimination and poverty.

61. The advancement of women, especially in Africa, should not be divorced from global economic, political and social development. The enormous debt-servicing burden coupled with the haemorrhaging of resources to the North, which left the

economies of the South in shambles, had adverse repercussions on the living conditions of women and children. That was why the United Republic of Tanzania called on the international community to take appropriate measures to rectify the situation, including making a re-evaluation of structural adjustment programmes.

62. The United Nations Secretariat should take the lead in the implementation of decisions already taken on the advancement of women in accordance with the principle of gender equality enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. His delegation noted with concern that the targets set by the General Assembly for the representation of women in the United Nations Secretariat would not be met by 1995. He hoped that the new strategic plan of action for the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat (1995-2000) would produce the required effects and that, in the implementation of that plan, particular attention would be given to women from Africa and other developing countries.

63. In conclusion, he noted that the advancement of women should be viewed as an important element of the social, economic and political well-being of nations because so long as more than half the world's population suffered from discrimination and inequality, the world could never hope for sustainable peace and security.

64. Mr. KÖNIG (Observer for the European Commission), speaking on behalf of the countries members of the European Commission, said that the Fourth World Conference on Women, for which members of the Commission had been actively preparing, would coincide with the end of the Third Action Programme on Equal Opportunities between Women and Men and the start of the Fourth Action Programme. The European Commission hoped that those events would permit a wide-ranging exchange of ideas and experience between European women and women from other regions of the world.

65. In preparation for the World Conference, the European Commission, in cooperation with the Instituto de la Mujer, had held a consultative conference in Toledo in April 1994, with a view to assessing developments in the European Union over the previous 10 years, identifying common views and making proposals for the future. After discussions with the national coordinators of the World Conference, the Toledo Conference, which had been attended by delegations from the member States and a wide range of experts, selected as priority themes women and the economy, women and solidarity and women in public life - topics which were common to women throughout the world. After the Toledo Conference, the Commission had produced a working paper which incorporated the results of the working sessions at the Conference and summarized developments in Union policy and actions since the Nairobi World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women. The results had been positive, since a significant body of legislation on equality and other measures had been drafted, a huge range of research projects undertaken, conferences organized and publications designed to inform and enrich the debate prepared. Moreover, attitudes towards equality-related issues had improved considerably and women had entered the work force in unprecedented numbers with some attaining seniority ranks that would have been unthinkable 10 years previously.

66. The members of the Commission had met with other States members of the Economic Commission for Europe at a regional conference held at Vienna. The Commission supported the Regional Platform for Action which had been adopted at Vienna and felt that the ensuing actions should be properly monitored and evaluated. To that end, the final action platform of the World Conference should concentrate on a limited number of carefully selected and well-defined issues.

67. Since the previous meeting of the Third Committee, the Commission had published two documents which stressed the fact that promoting equal opportunities was not only an issue of social justice but was also crucial to improving economic life. The Programme of Action which had been adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development had also made the same point. While fairness and justice demanded an end to discrimination and disadvantage, society as a whole could derive real practical advantages from such an approach. The first document, a report entitled "Employment, growth and competitiveness", was in response to growing anxieties about unemployment levels in the European Union. The other was a white paper on "European social policy: options for the Union" which recognized that structural change was affecting the gender balance in economic activities and that such a situation provided opportunities yet was fraught with dangers. It stated that the Commission was undertaking a series of actions in three areas: desegregation of the labour market and promotion of the value of women's work, reconciliation of employment and family life and acceleration of the participation of women in decision-making.

68. The Commission was convinced that the objective of equality would be frustrated if much more rapid progress was not made in the involvement of women in decision-making in all sectors of society. In that context, he noted that 5 of the 20 designated members of the Commission were women and that the number of women members of the European Parliament had increased by 7 per cent in June 1994. Before the elections the Commission's network of experts on decision-making had produced various slogans and ideas to encourage women's organizations and individuals to participate actively in that effort, and the European Union had noted with satisfaction that some of those slogans had been quoted at the United Nations on International Women's Day in March.

69. The Commission was very conscious of the need for a strong legal framework to implement the principles of equal opportunities. Such a framework existed at the European Union level and had been further reinforced by decisions of the European Court of Justice. In order to make that mass of information accessible, the Commission was producing a 15-volume encyclopaedia of legislation and case law on equality in each of the member States and in the Union as a whole.

70. The Commission was well aware of the fact that with the increasing globalization and interdependence of the world economy, it was linked as never before to its developing partners and must therefore foster solidarity with women in the developing world who, in addition to facing constraints similar to those of European women, had their own problems. The European Council of Ministers had repeatedly acknowledged the importance of ensuring that women

participated on an equal footing with men in all development cooperation programmes.

71. The Commission had accordingly secured the inclusion of those principles in the most recent Lomé Convention. A recent Council regulation on development cooperation with Asian and Latin American countries had stressed the importance of avoiding detrimental effects on women in mainstream programmes and of furthering the equal participation of women in social, economic and decision-making activities. The Commission's strategy was designed, on the one hand, to increase women's productivity and earnings by helping them to gain greater access to certain services (loans, technology and natural resources, including land) and, on the other hand, to develop human capital in the long term, through investment in various activities (literacy, education, improvement of nutrition, health care and hygiene) and to unlock women's own potential and power of decision-making. The Commission had undertaken a number of practical measures to ensure that those principles were respected and intended to sustain and intensify its efforts in that direction.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.